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ABSTRACT

The document, one in a series of four on women in American history, discusses women in the Colonial Era and the Early American Republic (1607-1820). Designed to supplement high school U.S. history textbooks, five chapters are devoted to women who were both famous and those who were not well known. Chapter I focuses on women in the founding days. Pocahontas, poet Anne Bradstreet, and religious dissenter Anne Hutchison are discussed. The plight of female indentured servants and black slaves is portrayed through writings and advertisements from that period. Chapter II covers women, family, and home in colonial times. The lives of black, white, and Native American women are contrasted. Chapter III focuses on colonial occupations of women. Diary excerpts depict lives of female shopkeepers, plantation managers, printers, doctors and midwives, innkeepers, and school mistresses. Chapter IV, "Women in the American Revolution," discusses the Daughters of Liberty groups and the role of women in the war effort. Chapter V is concerned with the rights of women during this era. Letters and diaries portray women who questioned their subordinate role in society, marriage, and education. The chapter concludes, however, that by the 19th century, the passive, ornamental lady set forth in ladies' books and female academies was becoming the ideal of femininity. Questions and suggested activities are provided at the end of each chapter. (KC)

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Women in American History: A Series

Book One

Women In the Colonial Era

and the

The Early American Republic

1607 - 1820

by

Beverly Sanders

American Federation of Teachers

SO 012 593

Women's Educational Equity Act Program

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INTRODUCTION

Women in American History, a four-part series, attempts to fill a serious gap in the American history curriculum as taught in most United States high schools today. Surveys of the most widely used American history textbooks repeatedly turn up the astonishing fact that these books almost totally neglect the lives and achievements of American women. Although the revival of a feminist movement in the 1960's and 1970's has resulted in a proliferation of women's studies courses at the college level and a flood of books dealing with the history of women, very little of this material has been adapted to the secondary school level, except where individual teachers have initiated courses of their own.

During the year in which I developed the series--a process that included visiting several schools and testing the material in the classroom--I realized that the average social studies classroom was unaffected by the growing and much publicized interest in women's studies. The same standard textbooks were still being used, and no supplementary material on women seemed to be available. (It should be said that some of the publishers of the venerable textbooks are producing auxiliary pamphlets on American minority groups, among whom women are included, to supplement their standard fare.) When quizzed, few students were able to name more than one outstanding American woman who had lived before 1900. (Their response was usually Harriet Tubman; black studies has made its mark.) Most of the teachers I worked with were eager to integrate material on women into their American history courses and were grateful for whatever material I could put directly into the hands of their students. Other teachers were indifferent and would be unlikely to teach such material unless they were directed to do so. The students were usually very interested, particularly in material that presented women as fighters for social justice, such as that relating to the antislavery speakers of the 1830's. As might have been expected, women students showed greater interest and enthusiasm than men. Yet the latter, even when openly hostile to women's claims for historical recognition, seemed stimulated by the material and eager to engage in discussion.

Each book in the series is a narrative of women's lives and accomplishments within a significant epoch of American history--an epoch normally studied in the standard history survey. There are, naturally, chapters devoted to women who were famous in their time, although many of these women had been virtually forgotten until the recent revival of feminism. Often the more well-known figures were reformers--abolitionists, temperance workers, crusaders for the mentally ill, etc.--reform work being the one public arena open to women, who were virtually barred from politics before the 20th century. Others earned fame and fortune in literary work, since writing was traditionally one of the few professions that could be practiced at home. There is, of course, considerable attention devoted to the women--women's rights advocates, suffragists, educators--who dedicated their lives to achieving equality for women.

It would be distorting women's history, however, to concentrate exclusively on the famous and the exceptional. Throughout our nation's history, most women, conforming to widely held religious and social views of their role, have lived anonymous lives as wives, mothers and unsung workers. Therefore, I have tried to devote roughly equal space to the lives and accomplishments of these "ordinary" women, whose names were not well known, but whose experiences have, fortunately, been recorded in diaries, letters, newspaper pieces and other documents that have been preserved. I hope each book sufficiently stresses that women have always been a vital part of America's labor force. On farms and in factories, women were there from the start: exploited and invisible, but making the wheels go round. Though the important economic role of women seems obvious, it was not always fully recognized and valued, especially during eras when it was popular to view the ideal woman as a nonworker, except for domestic chores. For each epoch, I have tried to show what conditions--economic, political, social and legal--advanced women toward equality with men or retarded their progress in that direction.

Although my intention was to produce a historical narrative and not a collection of documents, I have tried to include ample selections from primary sources whenever that seemed the best way to capture the flavor of certain periods and personalities. In my view, most secondary school textbooks offer too small a taste of primary sources, no doubt because the vocabulary and writing style of our 17th, 18th and 19th century ancestors are considered too difficult for the teenaged reader of today. To the contrary, I have found from my experiments with these materials that students will respond to authenticity when they find it, even if the language is difficult. Even slow readers will struggle through the rhetoric of an Angelina Grimke once they sense the woman's power and passionate devotion to an ideal of justice.

It has been noted that women's history generally falls into the increasingly popular disciplines of social and economic history, rather than the more traditional categories of political, diplomatic and military history. I would hope that exposure to the history of American women might awaken in high school students--male and female alike--an awareness that social and economic history exists and that it can have meaning for their lives. The emphasis in women's history on how people live and work might cause students to realize that history is about people like themselves--that their own lives, however obscure, contain the very stuff of history. The themes of women's history have, in my view, the potential for stimulating students' interest in history and for enriching and humanizing what for many young people might otherwise be a remote and abstract field of study.

CHAPTER ONE

WOMEN IN THE FOUNDING DAYS

THE SOUTHERN COLONIES

When Englishmen began exploring the North American coast for settlement in the sixteenth century, they did so in the name of a great Queen, Elizabeth I. It was in honor of the Virgin Queen that they gave the name of Virginia to the territory at which they aimed their efforts. But was there any sign in this of a hope that the English New World might be a promised land for women?

The first explorers and settlers of English North America were men, but it was only the presence of women in any of the colonies that meant the hope of permanent settlement. In 1585 a group of men sent out by Sir Walter Raleigh had gone to Roanoke Island, now part of North Carolina, and stayed for a year, but the first attempt to establish a permanent English colony there was made in 1587 by a group that included seventeen women and nine children as well as ninety-one men. This was the colony in which Virginia Dare, the first child of English America, was born in August of 1587. This might have been the beginning of our country's history, but within a few years the entire settlement at Roanoke disappeared mysteriously and without a trace, so that it is known to history as the "Lost Colony."

It was in the spring of 1607 that a group of men established at Jamestown what was to be the first permanent English colony in America, but this permanence did not begin to be a fact until September 1608, when two women arrived among a group of new settlers. Anne Forest came with her husband, Thomas, and also brought along her maid, Anne Burras, who was fourteen years of age. Within a few months Anne Burras was married too, to John Laydon, one of the settlers.

But though more women arrived in the next few years, they came in smaller numbers than the men at first, during the extremely harsh early phase of settlement at Jamestown. The winter of 1609 was particularly difficult--it was later known in the annals of the colony as "the starving time"--and at least one of the settlers resorted to cannibalism. An account written by a colonist tells us that "one among the rest slew his wife as she slept in his bosom, cut her in pieces, powdered her and fed upon her till he had clean devoured all her parts saving her head, and was for so barbarous a fact and cruelty justly executed."[1] One can readily see that these were circumstances which did not encourage the arrival of potential wives.

The colony almost gave up entirely in 1610, but it held on, and gradually the situation began to improve. Under a new leadership, the settlers learned the discipline of work and of raising their own crops instead of relying upon trade with the Indians for food. From about 1612 on, what had been a semimilitary trading post began turning into a self-sufficient and

even prosperous colony, especially after John Rolfe, one of the most industrious of the early settlers, showed the way toward the development of tobacco as a cash crop. A stable way of life was evolving at Jamestown, and with it a domestic structure that attracted growing numbers of women settlers. Some came as wives or daughters of men of the colony; most of the unattached women who arrived came as servants who, once their term of servitude ended, easily found husbands for themselves.

Pocahontas and John Rolfe

In the growing family structure of the colony, John Rolfe became famous as a husband as well as a developer of tobacco cultivation. In 1613, Pocahontas, a daughter of Powhatan, who was the leader of a federation of Indian tribes in the area, was taken captive by an English trader and held as a hostage at Jamestown. Relations between the English settlers and the Indians were still uneasy, and some of the colony's leaders evidently thought they could force a settlement by detaining Pocahontas, who was now perhaps eighteen years of age, possibly younger. She had already made friends at Jamestown as long ago as 1608, while still a child, and she does not seem to have taken badly to being held at the colony, where she was evidently free to go about as she pleased. At her own wish she was converted to Christianity, and by the spring of 1614 one of the settlers had fallen in love with her and wanted to marry her: this was John Rolfe. In a celebrated letter to the governor of the colony, which later was published, John Rolfe gives his reasons for wanting to participate in this first marriage in history between an Englishman and a Native American. Rolfe claimed it was "for the good of this plantation," and indeed it was; for the wedding in April 1614, produced an alliance at least between Powhatan and his new son-in-law's colony.

The marriage may well have been as much for political reasons as for love, but the couple had a son and became celebrated in England as in Virginia. In 1616, the governor of Virginia invited the Rolfes to visit England with him, and they sailed that spring with their infant son, Thomas, and an entourage of about twelve Indians. The "Indian Princess," who now dressed as an Englishwoman and called herself by the English name of Rebecca, was something of a sensation in London, though there were some intolerant spirits there who did not care for her "tricking up and high style and titles." She and her husband were presented to King James I and his wife, Queen Anne, and were their guests at a gala presentation, on January 6, 1617, of a masque by the great English playwright Ben Jonson. But the unhealthy air of a seventeenth-century European city proved gravely damaging to Pocahontas' health, as it had been to other Indians brought over in those days from the clean American forest, and she became ill and died just as her ship was leaving port to bring her back home. She lies buried in England to this day, at the parish church of St. George in Gravesend.

The Pocahontas Legend

But the legend of Pocahontas continued to grow, even after her death. It was in 1624 that Captain John Smith, one of the very first settlers of Jamestown but long since returned to England, published a history of Virginia

in which he told a story of how he had been taken captive by Powhatan in January of 1608. A group of Powhatan's men had dragged him to a pair of stones, laid his head upon them, "and being ready with their clubs to beat out his brains, Pocahontas, the King's dearest daughter, when no entreaty could preval, got his head in her arms, and laid her own upon his to save him from death." This selfless act persuaded her father to call a halt to the execution, and Powhatan and Smith then became friends, according to Smith's account. The story of Pocahontas' rescue of John Smith has since become even more famous than her marriage to John Rolfe, even though it was the latter that made her famous during her lifetime--and even though Smith does not seem to have told his own story to anyone until after her death. Indeed, this fact has cast clouds of suspicion over Smith to this day, and some historians maintain that he made up the whole story of his rescue at the hands of Pocahontas. But even if they are right, the fact that Smith chose Pocahontas to be the heroine of such a vital incident in the earliest history of Anglo-Indian relations in America shows how important she had become in the establishing of those relations.

This first marriage between Englishman and Indian in America also left its descendants. The widowed John Rolfe returned to Virginia in 1616, but left his small son in England to be brought up and educated there; this was perhaps fortunate for the survival of his and Pocahontas' line. Rolfe married an Englishwoman of the colony, but in 1622 his life came to an end in a tragically ironic way. By then, Powhatan had died and had been succeeded as a ruler of the Indian confederacy by his brother Opechancanough, who had never become reconciled to the growing English presence, which now consisted of several thousand colonists. In the spring of 1622, Opechancanough and his men staged a series of ambushes and killed some 350 English men, women and children. These attacks were not entirely unprovoked, for there were some English settlers who behaved badly toward the Indians; but among the dead was one of the best English friends that the Indians had known--indeed, not just a friend, but a son-in-law: John Rolfe. His name survived, however, for it was not until after 1622 that his son by Pocahontas, Thomas Rolfe, returned to his native soil from England; and there are Virginians who claim descent from him--and through him, from Pocahontas--to this day.

The other southern colonies, which were founded much later--Maryland in 1634, the Carolinas in the 1660's, and Georgia in 1733--did not undergo the same agonies Virginia did in her founding days, although conditions in them were by no means easy at first. In each one of them, a premium was placed on the presence of women from the outset, and rewards were given out accordingly. Here, for example, are some of the conditions set forth to prospective Maryland settlers in 1633 by Lord Baltimore, the founder of the colony:

> Any married man that shall transport himself, his wife and children; shall have assigned unto him, his heirs and assigns forever, in freehold...100 acres; and for his wife 100 acres; and for every child that he shall carry over, under the age of 16 years, 50 acres; paying for a quit rent 12 pence for every fifty acres.

> Any woman that shall transport herself or any children, under the age of six years, shall have the like conditions as aforesaid.
>
> Any woman that shall carry over any women servants, under the age of forty years, shall have for and in respect of every such woman servant, 50 acres; paying only a quit rent as aforesaid.[2]

Margaret Brent: Colonial Woman of Power

There were a few women in Maryland who came on their own, brought in servants, and were granted tracts of land. One of these, a woman named Margaret Brent (1601-1671), arrived in Maryland in 1638 as one of a number of English Catholics for whom that colony provided a refuge from religious persecution at home. She and her sister Mary had come with two of their brothers, but the two sisters, having brought servants and some personal means, were together granted a parcel of land on their own. Margaret raised lifestock and displayed considerable competence in the handling of her affairs, for the Maryland court records of the time show a number of instances in which she prosecuted her debtors and successfully collected what was owed her. Indeed, she was often given power of attorney to go to court for others, and though she seems never to have become a professional lawyer, she evidently grew to be a highly reputed amateur in this field.

With her legal skills, Margaret Brent eventually achieved prominence in the public affairs of the colony. In May 1647, Governor Leonard Calvert--the brother of Lord Baltimore--paid tribute to her abilities on his deathbed by appointing her executrix of his will. This left her with a major problem to deal with as soon as he died. It was a time of troubles in the colony, and Calvert had just put down a rebellion with the aid of troops from Virginia. He had promised to pay them out of his own estate and even out of his brother's if necessary, and Margaret Brent was left with the task of making good this vow to the restless soldiers. Discovering that Calvert's estate alone was not adequate to cover the cost, she sought to obtain power of attorney over the estate of the absentee Lord Baltimore as well. As his brother's executrix, she obtained it, and by selling some of Baltimore's cattle was able to pay the troops. When Baltimore, back in England, received news of what had happened, he protested angrily, but the Maryland Assembly wrote back in her defense saying:

> As for Mistress Brent's undertaking and meddling with your Lordship's estate here...it was better for the colony's safety at that time in her hands than in any man's else in the whole province after your brother's death, for the soldiers would never have treated any others with that civility and respect.[3]

This was not the end of the matter, however, for as a result of these events Margaret Brent took the action for which she has since become best

known to history. In January 1648, she demanded two votes for herself in the Maryland Assembly, one for her status as a landed proprietor--a vote that any man of that status was entitled to--and one for her newly won position as Lord Baltimore's attorney. Her request was denied, and she responded with a protest that is still on record: this was probably the first instance in American history of a woman demanding the right to vote.

The founders of the Carolinas made appeals to attract women as well as men similar to those made by the founders of Maryland. Pamphlets advertising the Carolinas made claims like this one:

> If any maid or single woman have a desire to go over, they will think themselves in the Golden Age; when men paid a dowry for their wives; for if they be but civil, and under 50 years of age, some honest man or other, will purchase them for their wives.[4]

Women of humbler origin than Margaret Brent thus also had their own chances of getting started in the New World. A striking figure from that time is that of Judith Manigault, a Huguenot refugee from religious persecution in France, who went alone as a young woman to South Carolina in 1685. Marrying a weaver, she settled down to the hard life of a pioneer woman, clearing the land and felling trees with her own hands. After her husband's death she married a more prosperous settler, and took in boarders while her husband started a distillery. Through her own efforts as well as those of her husband, she left behind at her death a fortune that her descendants could enjoy.

Georgia, the last of the original thirteen colonies in order of their founding, was established as a military buffer between Spanish Florida and South Carolina in 1733. Settled by a poorer class of people, including convicts, Georgia did not at first greatly encourage the coming of women, who were even prohibited from inheriting land there. This was changed after a while, and by 1740 General James Oglethorpe, the colony's founder, realizing the hardships endured by the unmarried soldiers there, urged an active recruitment of women settlers.

Mary Musgrove: Emissary to the Creeks

But the most outstanding woman of colonial Georgia was the American-born daughter of a Creek Indian mother. Born around 1700, Mary Musgrove was taken as a child to South Carolina by her father, an English trader whose name is not known, to be brought up and educated in the Christian religion. In 1716 she returned to the homeland of the Creeks along the Savannah River, and soon thereafter met and married John Musgrove, the son of a prominent South Carolinian who had been sent on a mission among the Indians. By the time of the founding of the Georgia colony, Mary and John were running a prospering plantation and trading post. Recognizing her abilities and her command of the necessary languages, Governor Oglethorpe

appointed Mary as his emissary to the Creeks at a handsome annual stipend of one hundred pounds. Eventually she established a trading post near the Florida border, from which she could survey the movements of the Spaniards and at the same time keep the Indians on friendly terms with the English.

After John's death, Mary married twice more, but her third husband, a clergymen named Thomas Bosomworth, was an ambitious and somewhat unscrupulous man. Using his wife's unique influence, he obtained for her a grant from the Indians of three offshore islands, and then demanded title for them, in the name of her services, from the governments in Georgia and England. As a result, the couple was granted St. Catherine's Island in 1759. There they built a manor house and raised cattle together until her death in 1763.

THE NEW ENGLAND COLONIES

The very first settlers of the southern colonies were individual men seeking their fortune in the face of danger from the Spanish empire as well as from an utterly untried wilderness. On the other hand, the first settlers of New England more than a decade later, coming to a land made a little safer by their predecessors, and many of them--the Pilgrims and Puritans--seeking a new environment for their religious convictions and way of life, tended to come as whole families from the very outset. As a result, the proportion of men to women was not so unbalanced in early New England as it had been in early Virginia. It therefore ought not to be too surprising that we find in the first century of New England's history women who are more outstanding than any in the South during the same period: Indeed Anne Hutchinson and Anne Bradstreet are two of the most outstanding women in all of American history. On the other hand, it is also not surprising that they were not women of affairs, like Margaret Brent, who could not have had a career like her own in New England, but that they were purely activists of the spirit, a New England specialty.

Anne Hutchinson: Religious Dissenter

The Massachusetts Bay Colony was a patriarchal society that did not tolerate religious dissension even among men like Roger Williams and Thomas Hooker, and so was certainly not likely to tolerate it from a woman. In that world, a husband was supposed to be his wife's spiritual guide, not the reverse, and a woman was not expected to bother her head too much with the contents of serious books. The first governor of the colony, John Winthrop summed up the prevailing viewpoint in an entry in his diary for April 13, 1645, when he told the sad story of Anne Hopkins, wife of the governor of Connecticut, who had lost her reason "by occasion of her giving herself wholly to reading and writing." Winthrop continues:

> Her husband, being very loving and tender of her, was loath to grieve her; but he saw his error, when it was too late. For if she had attended her household affairs, and

> such things as belong to women, and not gone out of her way and calling to meddle in such things as are proper for men, whose minds are stronger, etc., she had kept her wits, and might have improved them usefully and honorably in the place God had set her.[5]

With such an outlook, Winthrop's treatment of Anne Hutchinson (1591-1643), who spoke out so firmly on religious matters that she created a division in the Massachusetts Bay Colony called the Antinomian controversy, should not come as a surprise to us.

But if men could keep politics and commerce to themselves, religion was everyone's business, and the women of the colony had to concern themselves in it at least enough to become the best Christian daughters, wives and mothers that they possibly could be. The women of Massachusetts were fond of getting together each week to discuss the previous Sunday's sermons, and the home of Anne Hutchinson, soon after her arrival with her husband, William, in the colony in 1634, became a favorite place for such gatherings. The other women were attracted by Anne Hutchinson's skills in nursing and midwifery as well as her warm personality, but these were not her only virtues when it came to holding religious discussions. A minister's daughter who had lived for some years in London, Hutchinson was a woman of strong mind and deep religious convictions. While still in England she had become a follower of the dissenting minister John Cotton, and it was his departure for Massachusetts in 1633, fleeing the religious authorities at home, that had persuaded her to emigrate as well. It did not take long before the meetings at her home began to probe deeply into religious questions, and to include men among the eager participants.

The doctrinal subtleties of Hutchinson's position became extremely complex and remote from our concerns today, but the gist of her arguments can be briefly explained around the two contrasting terms that she herself used, the "Covenant of Works" and the "Covenant of Grace." The religious structure of Massachusetts Bay was theocratic, and its rules of doctrine and behavior were laid down by the magistrates and ministers. Anne Hutchinson regarded these rules as too rigid, and not truly reflecting the more spontaneous religion of the heart. It was this more spontaneous religion, based on a deeper penetration, as Hutchinson and her followers saw it, of the religion that wells up from within, that she referred to as the "Covenant of Grace," contrasting it with the "Covenant of Works" represented by most of the ministers of Massachusetts Bay. Indeed, Anne Hutchinson was soon saying that the only ministers in the colony who were under a "Covenant of Grace" were John Cotton and her own brother-in-law, John Wheelwright. Since she had many followers, this position caused a severe rift in the colony, and since religion was the colony's most serious business, she had to be dealt with by the authorities.

In 1637, the leaders of the colony under John Winthrop brought her to trial on charges of having spoken ill of the ministers of Massachusetts Bay. From the records that have come down to us of this trial it is clear that

Anne Hutchinson's enemies, most notably Governor John Winthrop, were condemning her not only for having dangerous opinions and being a divisive influence in society, but also for not behaving herself in a manner considered proper for a woman. At one point, Winthrop accused her of having "maintained a meeting and an assembly in your house that hath been condemned by the general assembly as a thing not tolerable nor comely in the sight of God nor fitting for your sex."[6] Winthrop also delivered a reprimand against William Hutchinson for being "a man of a very mild temper and weak parts and wholly guided by his wife." The threat of the upset of the balance of the sexes that Anne Hutchinson represented was dealt with even before the trial had begun, when the clergy of the colony passed a resolution forbidding women to gather in groups larger than sixty to hear the scripture interpreted by another woman.

A second trial was held in 1638, in which Hutchinson, after the many assaults upon her emotional well-being, even recanted her views, but the court nevertheless saw fit to deal with the danger she was supposed to represent by banishing her from the colony. When Governor Winthrop announced the sentence, the exhausted woman asked, "I desire to know wherefore I am banished?" To which the Governor replied: "Say no more, the court knows wherefore and is satisfied."[7]

Anne Hutchinson went with her husband and children to a new colony on the island of Aquidneck in Narragansett Bay, eventually to be part of Rhode Island. There in the summer of 1638 her agonies culminated in the birth of a child that was stillborn and deformed. When word of this got back to the ministers and magistrates of Massachusetts Bay, they saw this "monstrous birth" as evidence that God concurred in their judgment against her. After her husband's death, she migrated once again, to the Dutch colony of New Netherland, and settled with her six youngest children near Pelham Bay. There the same tragedy met her as had struck John Rolfe; for in 1642, she and all but one of her children were killed by Indians.

Anne Bradstreet: Poet

Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672) was living in Massachusetts Bay at the time of the Anne Hutchinson controversy, but whatever she thought about the matter she kept to herself, even though she was to become the colony's foremost poet. Perhaps this was because both her husband, Simon Bradstreet, and her father, Thomas Dudley, men of great eminence in the colony's affairs (her father was its governor for a time), had participated in Anne Hutchinson's trial. Anne Bradstreet was in no way a social outsider; in England, too, where she had spent the first eighteen years of her life, she had been born and raised a gentlewoman, and had received a thorough education, becoming well acquainted with the Bible and with the literature of her time. But privileged status did not shield her from the joys and sufferings of the women of her generation. This is reflected in her volume of poems, The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America, which was published in England in 1650 without her knowledge.

Bradstreet's poems tell of her frequent illnesses, the burning of her house, the births of her eight children, the deaths of her grandchildren, and her tender love for her husband:

> If ever two were one, then surely we.
> If ever man were lov'd by wife, then thee;
> If ever wife was happy in a man,
> Compare with me ye women if you can.[8]

Lines like these are proof to us that stern Puritans also knew what it meant to be in love.

There is even an occasional hint of rebelliousness in her poems. In the prologue to her book, she forcefully defends the right of a woman to be a poet:

> I am obnoxious to each carping tongue
> Who says my hand a needle better fits,
> A Poets pen all scorn I should thus wrong,
> For such despite they cast on Female wits:
> If what I do prove well, it won't advance,
> They'l say it's stoln, or else it was by chance.[9]

But despite occasional expressions like this and even of religious doubts, Bradstreet's poems in the end show her to be a good Puritan, who is able to reaffirm her powerful faith in God.

THOSE WHO CAME IN BONDAGE

Indentured Servants

Not every white settler from the Old World arrived in the English colonies as a free person. Indeed, in the South, probably more than half of the settlers from Europe during the colonial period arrived in bondage, as indentured servants. The term "indentured servitude" came to be used because of the indented shape of the contracts into which these people entered, which pledged them into bondage to the masters with whom the agreement was made, for a stated period of years, usually from four to seven. Many of the people who signed themselves over in this way did it because they wanted to get to the New World somehow, and were too poor to get there any other way; and sometimes a former indentured servant went on to make his or her own fortune in America. But some had been kidnapped or seduced by false promises, for cheap labor was desperately needed in America, and the conditions of their servitude during the contracted term were often hardly distinguishable from slavery. The servant had very few rights, could be bought and sold like a slave, and if he or she ran away, the term of service could legally be extended. Such punishment, along with a public whipping, might also be meted out to a woman who became pregnant out of wedlock during her term of service.

Fewer women than men came to the colonies as indentured servants, and because of the resulting scarcity, a woman had a reasonable chance of getting out of bondage before the expiration of her term by getting married. This of course could not be done without her owner's consent--the penalty for violating this could bring an extra year of servitude--and this consent would only be forthcoming if the prospective husband paid the owner compensation for the uncompleted time of service. Women thus had better prospects than men to rise in social station through marriage. In an early eighteenth century piece of verse, one Maryland planter's wife taunted another on this point:

> Tho now so brave
> I knew you late for a four-years slave,
> What if for planter's wife you go
> Nature designed you for the hoe.[10]

Black Slaves

Hard as their lot may have been, white indentured servants at least could look forward to an end to their term of bondage, and to the opportunity of then becoming a part of the general society. No such prospects existed for the black men and women brought to the colonies by force during the era of slave trading. Some of them may have had the status of indentured servants during the first half of the seventeenth century, but all who came over from about 1650 on were in bondage for life, and so were their children. Even those among them who in one way or another obtained their freedom had few hopes of getting ahead in the midst of a society that regarded them as an inferior race.

The terrible burden of slavery tended to fall differently on its male and female victims, for the sexual exploitation of black women by white men was an essential feature of the system from the start. This would manifest itself even during the horrors of the "middle passage," the transatlantic crossing of the slave ship. A recent history of the slave trade describes a typical situation of a "woman borne from Angola to the West Indies... roaming the deck of a ship that stank of excrement, so that, as with any slaver, 'you could smell it five miles down wind.' She had been torn from her husband and her children, she had been branded on the left buttock, and she had been carried to the ship bound hand and foot, lying in the bilge at the bottom of a dugout canoe. Now she was the prey of the ship's officers, in danger of being flogged to death if she resisted them. Her reward if she yielded was a handful of beads or a sailor's kerchief to tie around her waist."[11] This picture is added to by Alexander Falconbridge, an English surgeon who sailed aboard a slave ship in the eighteenth century:

> I saw pregnant women give birth to babies while chained to corpses which our drunken overseer had not removed....The younger women fared best at first as they were allowed to come on deck as companions for our crew....Toward the end of the run, which lasted nearly six weeks, the mortality thinned out the main hold, and some score of women were driven below as company for the males.[12]

On occasion, white slave owners formed sentimental attachments to their slave mistresses, though this was more common in the West Indies than in the continental English colonies. Such attachments never resulted in marriage, but they sometimes resulted in a more than passing concern for the children born of these unions. In the English West Indian colonies, the concept of the "mulatto" never ceased to have meaning, as in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies, and efforts often were made to improve the status of these children of partly English parentage. In the continental North American colonies, however, the term disappeared, and the typical white father of illegitimate slave children seemed to prefer forgetting about this part of his offspring.

One of the most shameful aspects of the slave system in America was the constant breaking-up of families that occurred. This was a burden that fell heaviest upon the women, so often separated in this way from their children. The situation can readily be pictured from this typical advertisement from the slavery period in American history:

> NEGROES FOR SALE. A Negro woman 24 years of age, and has two children, one eight and the other three years. Said Negroes will be sold SEPARATELY or together as desired. She will be sold low for cash, or exchanged for groceries.[13]

Another crucial aspect of the slave woman's lot, of course, was that she was viewed as a breeder. This is shown by a typical advertisement:

> NEGROES FOR SALE. A girl about twenty years of age (raised in Virginia) and her two female children, one four and the other two years old--is remarkably strong and healthy--never having had a day's sickness, with the exception of smallpox, in her life. The children are fine and healthy. She is very prolific in her generating qualities, and affords a rare opportunity to any person who wishes to raise a family of strong and healthy servants for their own use.[14]

The remarks would scarcely be different if the advertiser were talking about cows. Of course, the difference here was that the prospective buyer could also look forward to playing the role of bull. Thus the transformation of human beings into mere commodities went even beyond the treatment accorded to animals, degrading them in even the most sacred and intimate aspects of their beings.

NOTES

1. Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (1938; paperback ed., New York, 1972) p. 5. Quotation is from *Colonial Records of Virginia*, p. 71.

2. Clayton Colman Hall, ed., *Narratives of Early Maryland: 1633-1684* (1910; hardcover reprint, New York, 1953) p. 92.

3. Edward T. James and Janet W. James, eds., *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971) vol. I, p. 237. Quotation is from *Archives of Maryland*, I, pp. 238-239.

4. Spruill, *Women's Life and Work*, p. 15. Quotation is from *Narratives of Early Carolina*, p. 78.

5. John Winthrop, *Winthrop's Journal: "History of New England" 1630-1649* (1908; hardcover reprint, New York, 1966) vol. II, p. 225.

6. David D. Hall, ed., *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History* (Middletown, Conn., 1968) p. 312.

7. Ibid., p. 348.

8. Robert Hutchinson, ed., *Poems of Anne Bradstreet* (paperback, New York, 1969) p. 41.

9. Ibid., p. 119.

10. Arthur W. Calhoun, *A Social History of the American Family* (1918; hardcover reprint, New York, 1961) vol. I, p. 250.

11. Daniel P. Mannix in collaboration with Malcolm Cowley, *Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (1962; paperback ed., New York 1965) p. 113.

12. Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States* (1959; paperback ed., New York, 1974) p. 19.

13. Theodore Dwight Weld, *American Slavery as It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (1839; paperback reprint, New York, 1969) p. 168.

14. Ibid., p. 175.

Questions for Inquiry and Discussion

1. Why were women necessary if there were to be permanent settlements in English North America? What advantages were offered in order to attract Englishwomen to the colonies?

2. Why was the marriage of Pocahontas and John Rolfe an important event in the early history of Jamestown?

3. What was the Puritan view of woman's place in society? Read the passage from John Winthrop, pp. 8-9. What is Winthrop's opinion of women's mental abilities?

4. Why were Anne Hutchinson's actions viewed by the leaders of Massachusetts as a threat to the stability of the young colony?

5. Briefly identify the following women of early America: Margaret Brent, Mary Musgrove, Anne Hutchinson and Anne Bradstreet. Which one interested you the most? Why?

6. Reread the two advertisements for slaves, p. 13. What do they tell you about the situation of the slave woman?

Optional Activity

Prepare an oral or written report on an outstanding American woman from early colonial days, such as Anne Hutchinson, Anne Bradstreet, Pocahontas, Margaret Brent, or Mary Musgrove. For information, use the Bibliography as well as the resources of your school or public library.

CHAPTER TWO

WOMEN, FAMILY AND HOME IN COLONIAL TIMES

FAMILY AND HOUSEWORK

Marriage

In colonial times a woman's primary goal was to marry. Marriage was regarded as a "holy institution," the natural state, and men and women were urged to enter it as both a blessing and a duty. Unmarried men and women were both pitied and scorned--the men for having avoided a civic duty, the women for having missed out on the central purpose of a woman's existence. Colonial newspapers ridiculed the unmarried woman with cartoons showing ugly spinsters and articles charging that "an old maid is one of the most cranky, ill-natured...conceited, disagreeable...never-to-be-pleased, good-for-nothing creatures," pretending to hate men but secretly longing for a husband no matter what her age.[1] An unmarried woman, unless she had a large independent fortune such as Margaret Brent in Maryland, was likely to end up as a dependent in the household of a married brother or sister, a far less rewarding condition than being the head of one's own household. Considering, then, the attitude of society toward the unmarried and the alternative of dependency, it is not surprising that girls as young as twelve were already thinking seriously about marriage and that most women married before they were twenty.

Colonial men and women were more likely to marry for economic, social and religious reasons than for romantic love. In the poorer classes a wife was an economic asset to a man eager to acquire cheap land and start a household. Among the wealthy, marriage could be a means of gaining large landholdings; it was not unusual for a young man on the rise to marry a rich woman--perhaps a widow older than he--and by the same token, an extremely young girl might be married to an elderly wealthy man. Among the Puritans the virtue and piety of a prospective mate were taken into consideration. However, we should not conclude that there were no happy marriages in colonial times or that love never entered into the choice of a mate. There is much evidence from the writings of the Puritans, for example, that many experienced to the full the joys of married love. Anne Bradstreet's many poems to her "dear and loving husband" reveal the deep tenderness in the marriage bond that probably typified many marriages. Although Puritan parents usually arranged a daughter's marriage, she was free to reject their choice if she felt she would not be able to love him.

The most important purpose of marriage was to increase the population and large families were the rule in the English colonies. Historians mention a Rhode Island woman named Maria Hazard who "lived to the ripe old age of a hundred years, and 'could count five hundred children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren. When she died, two hundred and five of them were alive; and a grand-daughter of hers had already

been a grandmother near fifteen years.'"[2] It was quite common for a family to have ten or twelve children. Martha Jefferson Randolph, the daughter of Thomas Jefferson, for example, was the mother of twelve. In having many children, men and women believed that they were obeying the biblical command to "be fruitful and multiply," as well as fulfilling a patriotic duty to produce new citizens for the English empire. They also regarded their children as a valuable source of labor and a promise of future support in the event of misfortune and old age.

Quite a few husbands had a total of fifteen or sixteen children by two or more wives, since the hazards of childbearing were very great, and many women died young. Maria Hazard was remarkable more for her long life than for her fertility.

The Household Economy

From early colonial times until the end of the eighteenth century, the basic economic unit in society was the individual household. A husband and wife were equal partners in the full-time enterprise of providing the necessities of life, and if possible, producing a surplus to make money. They also usually commanded the labor of others--children, apprentices, dependent relatives, indentured servants or slaves. In this preindustrial area most families strived for self-sufficiency, producing their own food, clothing, housing and furniture, as well as household goods like candles and soap. Only a relatively few items--salt, sugar, tea, metalware--were purchased on the outside.

There was a division of labor along sex lines in the colonial household, although the tasks of men and women sometimes overlapped. By and large the man was responsible for building the house and furniture, clearing the land and planting crops, slaughtering the larger animals and possibly running a shop or business. The woman was responsible for feeding and clothing all household members, manufacturing household necessities, housecleaning, nursing and child care. Lest we think that these are the same chores homemakers perform today, we should remind ourselves of what they consisted of in those days before industrialization, supermarkets, home appliances and advanced medical knowledge.

Food. Feeding a family involved far more than just cooking. The first care of the colonial homemaker was tending the fire in the large brick or stone fireplace that was the main feature of the colonial kitchen. All the food was cooked there, either in heavy pots or kettles hanging from a bar inside the fireplace, or in ovens to the side or in the ashes of the fire. Throughout the year, the woman had to produce most of the food as well as cook it. She generally planted and tended a kitchen garden in which grew such vegetables as potatoes, carrots, turnips and other root vegetables that could be stored in cold cellars for the winter, and others like pumpkins, beans and squash that could be dried. Fruits such as apples and berries were dried or preserved rather than eaten fresh. The homemaker also cared for the barnyard animals--chickens, cows, and pigs. In order to have

a chicken in the kettle for dinner, the woman or one of her helpers had to slaughter, pluck and clean the fowl the same day. In chilly November, the "killing time" when the cows and pigs were slaughtered, she had the gigantic task, in those days before refrigeration, of salting the beef to preserve it, and smoking the pig meat into ham and bacon. She also made her own sausages.

In addition to the meat of barnyard animals, colonial families, especially on the frontier, enjoyed game such as deer, squirrel and wild turkeys. New Englanders ate fish and shellfish of all kinds, and some of the most plentiful, like cod and mackeral, were carefully dried and salted to keep. When fresh meat was available, it was usually roasted on spits in the fireplace. More frequently, the colonists ate salt meat, which had to be soaked before it could be simmered in a pot. Homemakers pickled a wide variety of foods--walnuts, cabbage, lemons, parsley, mushrooms--and it is likely that the sharp spicy flavors of the pickles, preserves and relishes served to disguise the rather disagreeable taste of the salted meat.

Corn, a gift of the American Indian to the English settlers, was a staple of the colonial diet, and women prepared it in a variety of ways, most of them called by Indian names--hominy, pone, suppawn, samp and succotash. Although corn could be roasted, steamed, broiled and eaten whole, more frequently it was ground into meal and made into porridges and puddings, or fried into corn cakes.

Colonial homemakers did not worry about varying the menu every day. There was too much drudgery involved in food preparation for them to truly enjoy it and find in it a means of demonstrating their creative ability. The tasks of clothing all the members of the household, on the other hand, while equally time-consuming, held out more possibilities for pleasurable work as well as the satisfactions of art and craftsmanship.

Clothing. Like food, clothing had to be made "from scratch," the very material for it coming from animals and plants. Fur and leather were popular materials for clothing, particularly for poorer people and people on the frontier, because they were easily available as a product of hunting, and didn't need to be woven into cloth. However, linen and wool were the characteristic colonial fabrics, and the colonial homemaker and her daughters had a hand in the production of them in all the stages from the natural product to the finished homespun cloth. Making linen cloth from the flax plant was a painstaking process that could take as long as sixteen months. The women tended the delicate flax plants, picked and dried them and then extracted the flax fibers for spinning into thread on the spinning wheel. They usually took the additional trouble of bleaching the naturally brown threads white. In wool making, the fleece from the sheep was cleaned, oiled and then combed to draw out the fibers to be spun into thread. The wool and linen threads could then be dyed with vegetable dyes which colonial women carefully concocted themselves. They frequently experimented with dyes and their recipes for favored colors were household treasures to be passed along to their daughters.

In a majority of households, women wove the linen and woolen threads into cloth on a hand loom, although eventually a professional class of weavers arose, consisting of men as well as women, to whom people would bring their homespun thread to be woven into cloth. A popular cloth called linsey-woolsey was made from a combination of woolen and linen thread. The fine linen was made into shirts and undergarments, sheets and tablecloths and countless other household items. Wool went into men's suits and all kinds of outer garments. Clothing took a long time to make because it was generally worked on in odd hours that women could spare from more pressing chores, and it was made to last a long time. Fabric was never thrown away; an adult's worn garment might be remade into a child's, and the scraps would be set aside for a patchwork quilt.

The Art of Needlework. Almost all colonial women, rich and poor, young and old, could sew, and were constantly engaged in needlework of one sort or another--knitting, patchwork, applique, embroidery--taking it out whenever they had an idle moment. Probably one reason women enjoyed needlework was that it was a social activity that could be done sitting down while chatting with female relatives and neighbors. But needlework offered more than sociability; through it colonial women were able to beautify their homes and express their creativity. The beautiful quilts and coverlets, samplers, embroidery pictures and other handicrafts that are today treasured objects in museums are ample evidence of the infinite skill of these women and of their delight in rich colors and bold designs.

Candle Making. A far less pleasant chore than sewing was candle making, which had to be done during the busy autumn season before the long dark winter set in. Most candles were made from tallow, a rendered animal fat which was melted with boiling water in a large heavy kettle over the fire. Rows of candle wicks hanging from thin rods were then dipped into the melted tallow, cooled, then dipped again and again until the candles had formed around the wicks. Another method was to pour the melted tallow into candle molds. Since candles were always scarce, they were stored away very carefully, and used very sparingly.

Cleaning and Nursing. The most unpleasant chores of all were the cleaning of houses, clothing and people. Water was scarce, and usually had to be carried into the house from a town pump or a nearby stream. The cleaning agent--a soft soap--was manufactured by a tedious process that involved the combination of animal grease and lye, a caustic substance derived from ashes. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, people had far lower standards of cleanliness and hygiene than we do today. They believed, for example, that bathing was unhealthy, so they didn't do it very often, and didn't seem to be troubled by body odors. The busy homemaker could not possibly do laundry and housecleaning every day, but rather set aside special days for it once a month, or even once in three months. Unquestionably the lack of attention to sanitation contributed to the frequent outbreaks of contagious diseases such as typhoid, tuberculosis, diptheria and smallpox throughout the colonial era.

There were very few trained doctors in the colonies and women had the main responsibility for treating and nursing the sick and wounded. They took this responsibility seriously. Most women collected and handed down recipes for medical remedies, most of them containing either herbs or alcoholic beverages. Although these remedies may not have cured seriously ill people, they probably did less harm than some of the professional medical practices of the day such as bleeding or applying leeches. Midwives--those who were skilled in delivering babies--were almost always women, until the middle of the eighteenth century, when male midwives claiming special training appeared on the scene. Owing to the general ignorance about the dangers of infection, many women died in childbirth and many children in infancy.

Child Rearing. Colonial parents generally felt the obligation not only to protect and support their children, but to teach them obedience and prepare them early in life for the work they would do as adult men and women. Mothers and fathers routinely punished their children for disobedience by whipping them or by shutting them up in dark closets. Play was discouraged, and from a fairly young age children were expected to contribute to the economic success of the household. It was not unusual among the Puritans for boys and girls as young as seven years old to be sent to live with a relative, or to become an apprentice with another family, possibly because it was feared that the affection of a mother for her children might prevent her from disciplining them properly. Though such child-rearing practices might seem harsh and unfeeling by modern standards, they were quite successful in producing boys and girls able to accept their adult economic and social roles early in life and without confusion.

Certainly by the time they were in their early teens, most girls were well acquainted with the wide variety of skills they would need as homemakers in their own right. Here, for example, is one day's work in the year 1775, set down in the diary of Abigail Foote, a Connecticut girl:

> Fix'd gown for Prude,-Mend Mother's Riding-hood,--Spun short thread,--Fix'd two gowns for Welsh's girls,--Carded tow,--Spun linen,--Worked on Cheesebasket,--Hatchle'd flax with Hannah, we did 51.lbs. apiece,--Pleated and ironed,--Read a Sermon of Dodridge's,--Spooled a piece,--Milked the cows,--Spun linen, did 50 knots,--Made a Broom of Guinea wheat straw,--Spun thread to whiten,--Set a Red dye,--Had two Scholars from Mrs. Taylor's,--I carded two pounds of whole wool and felt Nationly,--Spun harness twine,--Scoured the pewter.[3]

And in other entries she tells of washing, cooking, knitting, weeding, picking down from geese and making soap and candles.

BLACK WOMEN

Work

Perhaps the most important difference between the work of black women and that of white women is that black women worked in the field, while white women seldom did after the first years of settlement, unless they were on the frontier. We get a picture of black women working alongside black men in the field from the plantation diary of George Washington for the years 1787 and 1788:

> At the Ferry set 3 plows to Work- put the girl Eby to one of them. The Women preparing and hoeing the New ground in front of the House...The Women...were hoeing the Wet part of the ground between the meadows which the plows could not touch...two Men were cutting Trunnels for Fences, and the Women were carrying Rails from the swamp side to the Division fence.[4]

Women usually did as well as men picking cotton and sometimes were superior. Sometimes the most valuable field hand on a plantation, or the single most powerful individual, would be a woman.

Childbirth did not exempt slave women from field work, but owners who were mindful of the value of women as "breeders" were easier on them in the weeks before childbirth and allowed them four weeks after the birth of a child before compelling them to return to the field. The women "then take the child with them," noted a Northern observer of plantation slavery in the early nineteenth century, "attended sometimes by a little girl or boy, from the age of four to six, to take care of it while the mother is at work When there is no child that can be spared...the mother, after nursing, lays it under a tree, or by the side of a fence, and goes to her task, returning at stated intervals to nurse it."[5]

The women who escaped the toil of the fields worked as house servants. Only in the jobs of cook or mammy did the black woman have the opportunity to supervise others. Though many black men were able eventually to learn such skills as carpentry or blacksmithing by which they could earn money and hope to support themselves in freedom, almost no black women, with the exception of the few who could spin, had the chance to learn money-making skills. It is not surprising, then, that fewer women were to be found among runaway slaves.

Family

The working day of slave women was generally longer than that of slave men: in addition to their work in the field or house, they had the added burdens of caring for their families. The barracks and barn lofts in which slaves had been housed in the seventeenth century were replaced in the eighteenth century by individual cabins for slave families, as slave owners

became persuaded that it was in their own economic interests, not to mention the interest of morality, to promote a stable family life among the slaves.

The slave weddings, which often were festive occasions, were usually performed by the master or by a white or black preacher, with the master's family in attendance. It was the custom at the end of the ceremony for the couple to jump high together over a broomstick. Even amidst the celebration, however, the slaves rarely forgot that the marriage was unprotected by law and that the words "Till death do us part" were omitted from the ceremony. Sometimes a black preacher performing the marriage would comment slyly on this omission by declaring, "Till death or buckra [master] part you."[6]

The typical slave cabin consisted of one room, or possibly two for a favored slave, with a large fireplace where a hot fire was kept going even in warm weather. A slave cabin from the late seventeenth century was likely to contain the same items as one in the middle of the nineteenth; several chairs, a bed, an iron kettle and a brass kettle, an iron pot, a pair of pot racks, a pothook, a frying pan and a beer barrel.[7] Slaves generally made their own furniture. Although slave women were not, on the whole, as interested in sewing as white women, they did make quilts and hold quilting bees. Many slaves went out of their way to keep their cabins spotlessly clean, with a few flowers growing outside.

As might be gathered from the above inventory, black men and women cherished their cooking utensils, as much of their leisure time went into food preparation. To the basic rations provided by the master they added vegetables grown in a kitchen garden, game meat such as possum, squirrel, rabbit or raccoon, and stolen farm animals such as pigs. What made slave cooking special was the use of spices, especially red pepper, which came from Africa. Eventually the taste preferences of the slaves were transmitted to their white masters by the black cooks in the big houses. The cuisine known as "southern cooking" was largely the contribution of the slaves.

In the past historians have said that slavery destroyed black family life, producing a pattern of a dominant mother and an irresponsible or absent father.[8] More recently an historian has argued that despite the breakup of marriages through sales, and the lack of legal protection for the slave family, the slaves developed a stable, two-parent family pattern as well as an elaborate network of kinship relations.[9] This stable family life and kinship network, forged by the slaves themselves in ways often unknown to their owners, gave them a sense of identity apart from their masters, as well as the emotional strength to endure their difficult lives. In either case, it is probably safe to say that there was greater equality between men and women in the black slave family than in the white family. In a certain sense, black women were more equal to black men than white women were to white men. Both partners in the black couple were in bondage and had no legal rights. Black women worked side by side with men in field

and house, though there were some differences in jobs held by each sex. Although there is evidence that black women deferred to their husbands, and did everything possible to promote their self-esteem, they did not ordinarily experience the subordination to the husband that law and social custom imposed on even the wealthiest white woman.

NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN

From the beginning of the European encounter with the Indian peoples of the eastern coast of North America, the latter, whether hostile or friendly, resisted assimilation. They refused to be enslaved and tried to maintain their distinctive way of life. Though their tribal customs varied widely, virtually all Indian groups lived in harmony with nature. Yet they welcomed the goods that the white settlers brought--the tools, cooking utensils, weapons--and rapidly adapted them for their own use. Thus while they bitterly resented the takeover of their lands by the colonists, they also became dependent on them to a certain degree.

Work

Early European observers of the Indians in their villages came away with the impression that the women did all the work and that the men were idle except when engaged in hunting and warfare. It is probable that the Indian woman spent more hours in grinding wild and cultivated food than in any other work. But since they were thought to possess fertility, the women also planted and harvested the crops, although the men usually broke and cleared the ground. In some areas the men shared all the responsibilities for agriculture equally with the women, but wherever military prowess was paramount the men concentrated on war and left all the other work to women. The women also did the cooking and sewing, and had total responsibility for child care. They built the family home--the tipi or wigwam--and often engaged in handicrafts such as basket, pottery and jewelry making or the weaving of rugs. On the move the women carried the heavy burdens on their backs while the men, unburdened, led the way.

We must remember that the man's function as hunter and warrior was essential for group survival, and that men did not look upon the women as second-class citizens because they did the heavy work. The more a woman contributed to the sustenance of the tribe--and in agricultural tribes it was a great deal--the higher the status of women within the tribe.

It is to the Native American woman that we owe many of the foods we enjoy such as corn, as well as the techniques for preparing them. Indian women understood nutrition, and much of the Indian diet, aside from meat, consisted of vegetables that were cultivated, and wild foods such as berries, nuts and birds' eggs. They had various methods of preserving or drying meats that could then be carried on hunting trips or war parties. New England women learned from the Indians how to bake beans in earthenware pots buried in the ground in holes filled with hot stones and ashes and how to conduct a clambake by building a fire on stones in a pit and filling it with layers of clams, corn and seaweed.

Status

An Indian wife was not her husband's property. If her husband failed to provide her with necessities, or if she was unhappy, she could end her marriage simply by announcing that she was leaving, or, more commonly, by piling up her husband's belongings outside the door.

In less highly developed tribes such as the Cree, Shoshone, Karankaw and Coahuiltecan, which were primarily nomadic and devoted to hunting and gathering wild food, women were more likely to have a definitely inferior status. In tribes that were socially and politically advanced, on the other hand, women were likely to occupy positions of authority in both civil and religious affairs. Many of the largest Indian tribes were matrilineal societies. This means that men and women alike traced their descent through their mothers. In the East the matrilineal tribes included the Iroquois, the Mohegan, the Delaware, various tribes of southern New England, and the Powhatan confederacy in Virginia. In these tribes each member belonged to a clan within which inheritance of property and hereditary right to public office developed through the female line. Women had property rights and could build and own a house. A family usually dwelt in the mother's house. A woman's husband could not take her property from her even if the marriage dissolved. We should remember however, that despite the favorable status of women in many Indian societies, in no society were they known to exercise greater power or authority than men.

Child Rearing

Indian children were trained for their adult roles early in life: the boys for hunting and warfare, the girls for their household and agricultural duties. Although such training began early, Indian child-rearing practices were not at all harsh or repressive. Many European observers, even those hostile to the Indians, noted that they treated children with tenderness, affection and attention. One eighteenth century settler, Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, remarked on the difficulty of weaning an Indian youth away from the ways of his tribe:

> There must be something very bewitching in their manners, something very indelible and marked by the hand of nature. For take a young Indian lad, give him the best education you possibly can, load him with your bounty, with presents, nay with riches; yet he will secretly long for his native woods... and on the first opportunity he can possibly find, you will see him voluntarily leave behind him all you have given him and return with inexpressible joy to lie on the mats of his fathers.[10]

The same writer commented on the attraction of Indian life for whites who as children had spent time in Indian captivity:

> By what power does it come to pass, that children who have been adopted when young among these people, can never be prevailed on to readopt European manners? Many an anxious

> parent I have seen after the last war, who at the return of the peace, went to the Indian villages where they knew their children had been carried in captivity; when to their... sorrow, they found them so perfectly Indianised, that many knew them no longer, and those whose more advanced age permitted them to recollect their fathers and mothers, absolutely refused to follow them, and ran to their adopted parents...[11]

The ease with which most Indian tribes adopted outsiders--whites, blacks and Indians from other tribes--is demonstrated in the many stories of Indian captivities that occurred throughout the colonial period. One of the most famous of such cases was that of Mary Jemison (1743-1833), who spent her whole life among the Senecas, after having been captured at the age of 14 during the French and Indian War.

NOTES

1. Spruill, *Women's Life and Work*, p. 138.
2. Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (one-volume edition, New York, 1930) p. 83.
3. Alice Morse Earle, *Home Life in Colonial Days* (1898; hardcover reprint, Middle Village, New York, 1975) p. 253.
4. Linda Grant De Pauw and Conover Hunt, *"Remember the Ladies": Women in America 1750-1815* (New York, 1976) p. 68.
5. Weld, *American Slavery as It Is*, p. 12.
6. Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974) p. 481.
7. Ibid., p. 530.
8. Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1956) p. 344.
9. Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York, 1976) p. 3.
10. J. Hector St. John De Crèvocoeur, *Letters From an American Farmer* (1782; paperback reprint, New York, 1957) p. 209.
11. Ibid., p. 208.

Questions for Inquiry and Discussion

1. List the most important reasons for which young people married in colonial times.

2. Compare the typical colonial household with an average American household today. Is the division of labor between men and women the same? Explain.

3. What were the advantages of being introduced to one's lifework at an early age, as was the case with colonial boys and girls?

4. Describe the work of slave women. Why were they less likely to run away than slave men?

5. What was the usual division of labor between the sexes in American Indian societies?

6. How did Indian methods of child rearing compare with that of the English colonists? Read the two passages from Crèvecoeur, p. 24. What point does he make about Indian child rearing methods?

Optional Activity

Colonial women usually excelled in needlework, and many of the products of their skill--samplers, quilts, embroidery, needlepoint--are on display in museums and historical societies. There are beautifully illustrated books available devoted to these now valuable antiques. Do research on at least one kind of needlework practiced by colonial women and prepare a class exhibit. (Since colonial women generally worked in the company of others, it would be appropriate to make this a group project. An ambitious class or committee might want to make a quilt or a variety of needlework objects.)

CHAPTER THREE

WOMEN MAKING MONEY: COLONIAL OCCUPATIONS

Shop and Workshop

As if the job of managing the colonial household were not enough, many women also engaged in money-making occupations. Most colonial families wanted to go beyond the struggle for subsistence and self-sufficiency that was typical of life in the earliest days of settlement and on the frontier. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Americans were seeking to make money not only as farmers and planters, but in a variety of occupations: blacksmiths, shipbuilders, tavern keepers, printers, merchants, to name a few. Women were to be found in nearly all the same occupations as men: landed proprietors, shopkeepers, tavern keepers, midwives, tinkers (pot and kettle makers), and foundry owners. We know that women worked in these occupations because they regularly advertised their goods and services in the colonial newspapers. The following notice, placed by a dry goods dealer in a Charleston, South Carolina, newspaper in 1737, was typical:

> Just imported...from London, and to be sold by Lucy Weaver in Broad Street, china...cups, sawcers, glass decanters, wine and water glasses, bohea tea, double refin'd sugar, fine lace and edging...hoop-petticoats, womens and childrens stays, toys, and many other sorts of European Goods at reasonable rates.[1]

Most colonial business enterprises were carried on either in the household or in a shop or workshop adjoining it. Many a woman turned a household skill into a money-making sideline or full-time occupation; weaving, butchering, baking, dressmaking, tanning, and nursing are just a few examples of enterprises that naturally grew out of "women's work." More commonly, a woman helped her husband, or other male relative, run his business or trade, and, in the process, informally learned to conduct the business herself. It was very common, as well as completely acceptable, for a wife to carry on a business in her husband's absence or to succeed to the ownership in the event of his death. The following type of advertisement frequently appeared in the newspapers:

> This is to give Notice that Hannah Lade Widow and Administratrix of Mr. Nathaniel Lade deceased, continues in the House and Shop and keeps on the Business of her said late deceased Husband.[2]

Although most of the women heading businesses and farms were widows, there were also women who started businesses on their own initiative.

Not surprisingly, wives whose husbands were frequently away developed unusual independence in business affairs. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur,

a Frenchman who settled in the American colonies during the eighteenth century, described the remarkable women of Nantucket Island, whose menfolk were mainly engaged in whaling and shipping:

> As the sea excursions are often very long, their wives in their absence are necessarily obliged to transact business, to settle accounts, and in short to rule and provide for their familes. These circumstances being often repeated, give women the abilities as well as the taste for that kind of superintendency, to which, by their prudence and good management, they seem to be in general very equal...The men at their return, weary with the fatigues of the sea, full of confidence and love, cheerfully give their consent to every transaction that has happened during their absence, and all is joy and peace. "Wife, thee hast done well" is the general approbation they receive for their application and industry.[3]

Some of the Nantucket wives built up thriving businesses completely on their own initiative. "The richest person now in the island," noted Crèvecoeur, "owes all his present prosperity...to the ingenuity of his wife:...for while he was performing his first cruises, she traded with pins and needles, and kept a school. Afterward she purchased more considerable articles, which she sold with so much judgment, that she laid the foundation of a system of business, that she has ever since prosecuted with equal dexterity and success."[4]

Landed Proprietors and Farmers

Since farming was the occupation of the majority of the colonists, and land ownership the main source of wealth, we should not be surprised that many women were to be found running farms and plantations and otherwise supervising landholdings. Most of these women had inherited their property from a husband or father, but a number of them acquired the land in their own right. We know that single women received large grants of land in the founding days of the colonies. Margaret Brent of Maryland, and Elizabeth Haddon Estaugh, founder of Haddonfield, New Jersey, were two examples. In New York, Maria Van Rensselaer, a widow, successfully administered the vast estate of Rensselaerwyck near Albany during the period when New York was shifting back and forth between the English and the Dutch.

Many women were active heads of plantations in the South. Southern newspapers of the eighteenth century were filled with notices by women offering houses, land, slaves and horses for sale, claiming debts and announcing rewards for runaway slaves. The best known of women planters, a woman whose interest in agriculture benefited her whole region, was Eliza Lucas Pinckney (1722-1793) of South Carolina.

At age seventeen, Eliza Lucas assumed the management of her father's three plantations when he, a British officer, was ordered to the West Indies. In addition to caring for her invalid mother and younger sister,

she ran a school for her sister and the slave children, managed the plantation and began to experiment with crops. In a journal entry of 1739 she wrote:

> I wrote my father a very long letter on his plantation affairs...on the pains I had taken to bring the Indigo, Ginger, Cotton, Lucern, and Cassada to perfection, and had greater hopes from the Indigo--if I could have the seed earlier the next year from the East Indies--than any of the rest of the things I had tryd,...also concerning pitch and tar and lime and other plantation affirs.[5]

For several years she experimented with the cultivation of indigo, from which is derived the blue dye-cakes much desired in England for cloth manufacture, and which could then only be purchased from the French-held islands in the West Indies. By 1744 Eliza's close supervision had resulted in a successful crop from which the seed was distributed to other Carolina planters, and before long indigo had become one of the staples of the Carolina economy.

After her marriage in 1744 to Charles Pinckney, a distinguished lawyer and landowner, Eliza experimented with the culture of silkworms on her husband's plantation. When Charles died, leaving her in charge of seven separate landholdings, she handled the business successfully, while at the same time supervising by mail the education of her two sons, who were at school in England. Both sons fought with the Continental army in the Revolutionary War, and later distinguished themselves in public service. One of them, Charles Pinckney, was Federalist candidate for president in 1804 and 1808.

Another woman who was a successful farmer, as well as matriarch of an important family, was Abigail Adams (1744-1818), wife of John Adams, the second president of the United States, and mother of John Quincy Adams, the sixth president. Though John Adams was a lawyer by profession, he regarded his farm in Braintree, Massachusetts, as his main source of wealth. During his frequent absences from home on public business, Abigail Adams managed the property while keeping her husband informed of the details by means of her lively letters. In her letter of May 14, 1776, for example, she takes up the pressing problem of hiring and firing farmhands:

> We have had fine Spring rains which makes the Husbandary promise fair--but the great difficulty has been to procure Labourers...A man will not talk with you who is worth hireing under 24 pounds per year...Isaac insisted upon my giving him 20 pounds or he would leave me. He is no mower and I found very unfit to take the lead upon the Farm, having no forethought or any contrivance to plan his Buisness, tho in the Execution faithful...I asked advice of my Friends and Neighbours [and] they all adviced me to let Isaac go...I setled with him and we parted. Mr. Belcher

> is now with me and has undertaken to conduct the Buisness, which he has hitherto done with Spirit and activity...We are just now ready to plan, the barly looks charmingly, I shall be quite a Farmeriss an other year.[6]

She also bought and sold livestock, acquired new land and ordered the construction of new farm buildings. She continued to supervise the operations of the farm from afar when the Adams family was living in Europe or in the different capitals of the young American republic. She is generally credited with having saved John Adams from the financial ruin faced by other public men, including Jefferson, who devoted themselves to the nation at the expense of their private affairs.

Printers

Printing and newspaper publishing flourished in the American colonies and the early republic, and a striking number of women distinguished themselves in this lively trade. No less than six women held the post of official printer in various colonial governments. Certain families tended to dominate the trade, and there were frequently two or more generations of women in a printing family.

The very first woman printer on record was Dinah Nuthead, who, in 1694, inherited her husband's printing press at St. Mary's and later transferred it to Annapolis. She was authorized by the Maryland Assembly to print legal documents. The first woman newspaper publisher in the colonies was Elizabeth Timothy, whose husband, Lewis, in partnership with Benjamin Franklin, became publisher of the South Carolina Gazette in 1733. When Lewis Timothy died in 1738, his widow continued to publish the newspaper and also conducted a printing business. Benjamin Franklin, for one, found her conduct of the business superior to her husband's. Peter Timothy, Elizabeth's son, succeeded to the business in 1746 and when he died, his widow, Ann Timothy, following in her mother-in-law's footsteps, published the newspaper and became state printer, holding both posts until her death in 1792. Other women in the colonies who assumed the duties of newspaper publishing as widows were Anne Catherine Green, publisher of the Maryland Gazette and state printer of Maryland, and Clementina Rind, publisher of the Virginia Gazette and public printer of Virginia. Since these women had children to support, economic necessity as much as professional skill inclined them to take charge of the family business.

The most outstanding woman printer during the revolutionary era was Mary Katherine Goddard (1738-1816). Her brother William Goddard first opened a printing shop and newspaper in Providence, Rhode Island, with money provided by their mother, Sarah Goddard. Both mother and daughter learned the trade and ran the shop in William's frequent absences, a pattern that they followed in his next venture, a shop and newspaper in Philadelphia, where Sarah died in 1770. When William moved on to Baltimore to found that city's first newspaper, the Maryland Journal, as well as a new printing business, the level-headed Mary took charge of the business while her restless brother occupied

himself with a plan for an intercolonial postal system. During the Revolution, she was Baltimore's official printer and was given the important job of printing the official copy of the Declaration of Independence--that is, the first printed copy to have the names of all the signers. It came off her presses in January 1777, her full name appearing at the bottom of the document.

From 1775 to 1789, Mary Goddard served as postmaster of Baltimore, possibly the first woman in America to hold such a post. When she was relieved of the job on the grounds that a man was needed to supervise the southern department of the postal system, she fought to keep it, petitioning the Postmaster General. Though unsuccessful, she received warm support in her claim from Baltimore business leaders as well as from public figures like Jefferson. Unmarried and independent all her life, Mary Goddard spent her remaining years running a Baltimore book shop. Since, unlike her brother, she did not engage in controversy, we do not know her views on many of the issues of an exciting era. It is plain from the record, however, that her professional skill earned her the esteem of all who did business with her.

Doctors and Midwives

In the nineteenth century women were almost totally excluded from the field of medicine, and even in the twentieth century, men far outnumber women in the profession. During most of the eighteenth century, however, women were as free as men to practice medicine--or as it was called then, "physick" or "chirurgery." There was no special training required, and women, who customarily cared for the sick in their own homes, were thought to have a special knack for the healing arts. Homemakers were accustomed to experimenting with herbal remedies and other medicinal concoctions. Women who practiced medicine outside their own households often advertised their remedies and cures in the newspapers, promising to treat everything from ringworm to cancer. Many women also advertised their services as nurses. Both medicine and nursing tended to be sidelines, a means for poor women to earn extra money.

Midwifery, on the other hand, was a full-time occupation almost exclusively reserved for women. The midwife usually supported herself by her work and was a highly valued person in the community. In that era of large families, the achievements of midwives were sometimes mentioned in the newspapers. A South Carolina newspaper of 1766, for example, carried the following obituary notice:

> Tuesday last died, greatly lamented, age 73 years, Mrs. Elizabeth Hunt, a native of this province, and practising midwife.--It is said to appear, by an account regularly kept by her, that she had been present at the birth of near 4000 children.[7]

By the middle of the eighteenth century, male doctors and male midwives had begun to compete with female midwives for the job of delivering babies, though most people still violently disapproved of them as a threat to female modesty.

Attorneys

There were no women lawyers or judges during the colonial period, but there were instances of women conducting legal business. Like medical training, legal training was informal. Thus it was possible for women to acquire the legal knowledge necessary to draft a will or other documents, or to exercise the power of attorney for a male relative. One notable record we have of a colonial woman carrying on legal transactions is the Journal of Madam Sarah Kemble Knight, a rugged woman who undertook a journey on horseback from Boston to New York in 1704. The purpose of Sarah Knight's five-month trip was to settle a cousin's estate. She evidently stuck to her business, making sure it was settled to her liking before returning to Boston to tell the story of her "transactions and travails." Sarah Knight's Journal is prized today for its vivid picture of the hazards and discomforts of travel in 1704 and for her amusing portraits of that familiar colonial figure, the tavern hostess.

Tavern Hostesses and Innkeepers

Keeping a tavern or inn was an occupation that many women entered in the days of stagecoach and horseback travel, when the sign of a tavern or inn along a dark country highway was a welcome one to the weary traveler. In the large towns, particularly during court or assembly sessions, the local taverns were important centers of information, social life and political activity. Most inns and taverns were run by a husband and wife, but a large number of them were run by women alone, many of them widows.

Providing food, drink and lodging for strangers was another occupation that was an extension of women's household work, and could be easily undertaken by women with a need to support themselves. For example, a widow left with a need to support themselves. For example, a widow left with a large house might find it easier to take in lodgers than to continue farming. To turn her home into a tavern she merely had to buy additional beds, stock her cellar with wine and beer and put in a billiard table. She then applied for a license, hung out a sign and advertised her tavern in the newspapers. A location near a ferry, along a highway or close to the courthouse in town would guarantee her customers.

The quality of colonial inns varied widely, from a rundown dwelling with a dirt floor and vile food run by a slovenly woman, to an elegantly furnished house with excellent food and service presided over by a well-bred woman, with many grades in between. Successful tavern hostesses who earned the reputation for providing their guests with "the best entertainment and civilized usage" built thriving businesses which could be passed on to the next generation. Thus Elizabeth Marriott, a well-known tavern hostess in Annapolis, left her establishment to her daughter Anne Howard, who in 1757 placed the following notice in the Maryland Gazette:

> ANNE HOWARD, (Living at the Sign of the SHIP where her Mother formerly kept Tavern, in Annapolis, and) having

> a Number of very good spare Beds and Bedding, and a convenient House for Entertainment, will take in Gentlemen of the Assembly, at the ensuing Session, at THREE SHILLINGS per day.
>
> N.B. She keeps a House of Entertainment for Strangers as usual.[8]

Some seventeen years later, Anne Howard was hostess to George Washington when he stayed in Annapolis.

Schoolmistress

Schoolteaching was another occupation that colonial women entered without very much preparation. Though we tend to think of teaching as a profession in which large numbers of women were always engaged, this trend did not actually come about until the late eighteenth century. There were few women teachers on record in the early colonial period. However, during the fifty years leading up to the Revolution, more and more women came to be employed as governesses and "school-dames." Many set up day or boarding schools with their husbands or on their own. Women teachers usually taught reading, writing, arithmetic, music, French and needlework and--if they had the talent--drawing and painting. For certain versatile women, teaching or running a school was only one occupation among many. Colonial advertisements tell us of women who combined teaching with anything from laundering to making bonnets.

An unusually versatile woman who supported herself and her family as a novelist, playwright, actress and schoolmistress was Susanna Rowson (1762-1824). Her novel Charlotte Temple, published in London (1791) and later in Philadelphia (1794), became the first American best seller. The story of an English schoolgirl who is seduced, brought to New York and abandoned could be viewed as a quiet protest against women's dependence on men. Rowson next turned to the stage, appearing as an actress, singer and dancer in over 100 productions, most of them musicals. As a playwright, Rowson produced a patriotic operetta entitled Slaves in Algiers, or a Struggle for Freedom and a popular musical farce on the Whiskey Rebellion called The Volunteers, as well as a number of other productions. Giving up her stage career, Rowson used some of her musical and dramatic skills in her next venture, a Young Ladies Academy in Boston, one of the first such schools above the elementary level in the United States. Her school was unusual for including training in public speaking and music taught by reputable European instructors. Even while conducting the school, Susanna Rowson wrote textbooks and continued to publish novels, plays and poetry.

Colonial and Revolutionary-era women participated fully in the economy of their time, more fully than women were to do in the nineteenth century. Women who engaged in business were paid the same as men for their goods and services. The wide range of occupations that they engaged in, and the ease with which they entered them, should clearly demonstrate to us that during the founding period of the American Republic, despite the inferior status of women under the law, no notions of "ladylike" behavior prevented women from going into the world and making money.

NOTES

1. Spruill, *Women's Life and Work*, p. 279. Quotation is from the *South Carolina Gazette*, January 29, 1737.

2. Ibid., p. 276. Quotation is from the *South Carolina Gazette*, April 9, 1741.

3. Crèvecoeur, *Letters*, p. 141.

4. Ibid., p. 141.

5. Elizabeth Dexter, *Colonial Women of Affairs Before 1776* (1931; hardcover reprint, New York, 1972) p. 120.

6. L.H. Butterfield, Marc Friedlaender and Mary-Jo Kline, eds., *The Book of Abigail and John: Selected Letters of the Adams Family, 1762-1784* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975) p. 128.

7. Spruill, *Women's Life and Work*, p. 273. Quotation is from the *South Carolina Gazette*, December 22, 1766.

8. Ibid., p. 298. Quotation is from the *Maryland Gazette*, August 25, 1757.

Questions for Inquiry and Discussion

1. Below are the names of some of the women mentioned in Chapter Three. Match the name of the person with the statement that best describes her.

1. Eliza Lucas Pinckney	a. The wife of a political leader, she competently managed a Massachusetts farm
2. Mary Katherine Goddard	b. She rode on horseback from Boston to New York in 1704 to conduct legal business and kept a diary of the trip
3. Elizabeth Marriott	c. She was a renowned midwife who delivered some 4,000 babies
4. Abigail Adams	d. She was a dry goods merchant who advertised in colonial newspapers
5. Elizabeth Timothy	e. She skillfully managed several South Carolina plantations and conducted experiments with indigo
6. Sarah Kemble Knight	f. She printed the official copy of the Declaration of Independence
7. Lucy Weaver	g. She was the first woman newspaper publisher in the colonies and worked with Benjamin Franklin
8. Elizabeth Hunt	h. She was a famous tavern hostess who left her business to her daughter

2. Why was it relatively easy for women to enter almost every occupation in colonial times? According to Crèvecoeur, p. 28, why were Nantucket wives naturally skilled at business?

3. List some of the reasons that women dominated medicine in the colonial period. Remember that this situation was completely reversed in the 19th century, when the field of medicine became a male monopoly.

Optional Activity

Write a paper on Abigail Adams. The best primary source is the correspondence between Abigail Adams and her husband, John Adams; these letters are one of the liveliest records we have of life in the revolutionary era (see Bibliography). Using the letters and perhaps other material, discuss Abigail Adams as a wife and mother; describe her handling of farm and business affairs; and evaluate her views of women's education and place in society.

CHAPTER FOUR

WOMEN IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

DAUGHTERS OF LIBERTY

As trouble began to brew between the thirteen colonies and England in the 1760's over the issue of "taxation without representation," women were active in the growing movement of opposition to English rule. Organizations of women were nothing new in the colonies. Women had long been in the habit of meeting informally to sew and spin, and it is likely that they discussed political and economic matters at these meetings. For example, in 1733 a group of widows published the following complaint in a New York City newspaper:

> ...We are House Keepers, Pay our Taxes, carry on Trade and most of us are she Merchants, and as we in some measure contribute to the Support of Government, we ought to be entitled to some of the Sweets of it; but we find ourselves entirely neglected, while the Husbands that live in our Neighborhood are daily invited to Dine at the English governor's Court; we have the vanity to think we can be full as Entertaining, and make as brave a Defence in Case of an Invasion and perhaps not turn Taile so soon as some of them.[1]

This mood had subsided somewhat by the mid-eighteenth century, when a restrictive code of behavior had emerged which discouraged upper-class women from concerning themselves with politics or public issues, lest they lose their feminine softness and modesty. During the revolutionary crisis, however, such ideas were suspended, and all women were encouraged to engage in patriotic activities.

When patriotic organizations like the Sons of Liberty sprang up in response to the Stamp Act in 1765, patriot women in the different colonies formed "Daughters of Liberty" groups. The women pledged themselves to boycott British goods, particularly those on which the unpopular taxes were imposed. They stepped up the spinning and weaving of cloth in order to punish the British, for whom cloth manufacture was the most important industry, and to increase the self-sufficiency of the colonies. Wealthy men and women made it a point of pride to wear clothing made of homespun cloth instead of the fine imported fabric they ordinarily favored. Women were also among the merchants and other citizens who signed nonimportation agreements, in which they promised not to buy or import British goods.

The nonimportation agreements, made after the Stamp Act Congress and again after the Townshend Acts in 1767, were so effective in causing hardship in England that in 1770 Parliament repealed the Townshend Acts, leaving only the tax on tea. Women then showed their imagination and enthusiasm in the tea boycott that followed. They formed anti-tea leagues, made pledges to give up tea and concocted "liberty teas" from local plants such as sassafras, sage, strawberry, raspberry and currant to substitute for the popular

beverage. In February 1770, some three hundred Boston matrons signed a document pledging themselves not to drink tea until after the Revenue Act was repealed. After Parliament passed the Tea Act in 1773, bringing about an East India Company monopoly, anti-tea activity was stepped up even further, as women throughout the colonies issued anti-tea petitions and declarations. Probably the most well known of the anti-tea declarations was the one signed by a group of fifty-one women in Edenton, North Carolina, in October 1774, shortly after the meeting of the First Continental Congress. The Edenton women vowed to renounce the "Pernicious Custom of Drinking Tea" and also not to "promote the wear of any Manufacture from England until such time that all Acts which tend to Enslave this our native Country shall be repealed."[2] The "Edenton Tea Party" aroused enough attention to provoke an English cartoon depicting a group of smirking, mostly unattractive women boldly emptying their tea canisters and signing the declaration.[3] The sentiments of patriotic women were summed up in these lines from a poem published in 1774 in the Virginia Gazette:

> ...No more shall I dish out the once lov'd Liquor,
> Though now detestable,
> Because I'm taught (and I believe it true)
> Its use will fasten slavish Chains upon my Country,
> And LIBERTY'S the goddess I would choose
> To reign triumphant in America.
>
> From "A Lady's Adieu to her Tea Table"[4]

On the eve of the war for independence, there were women who used their pens to write revolutionary propaganda. The most prominent of these was Mercy Otis Warren (1748-1814), whose husband, James, a member of the Massachusetts legislature, and whose brother, James Otis, an attorney, were leading patriots. Mercy Warren's home in Plymouth becaue a gathering place for the leaders of the opposition to the Crown in Massachusetts, a group that included John and Samuel Adams. Despite the lack of formal schooling, Mercy Warren was an unusually well-informed woman, having as a girl sat in on her brothers' lessons and learned to use her family's well-stocked library. Having some literary talent as well as a keen interest in politics, she wrote plays poking fun at the royal governor of Massachusetts and the local Tories. These plays, or political satires, were meant to be read in the newspapers as propaganda rather than performed on the stage. The first, The Adulateur, was published in 1772, followed by The Defeat and next by The Group in 1775. Mercy Warren thinly disguised the royal governor and the Tories, who would be well known to local readers, under the names Rapatio, Judge Meagre, Sir Spendall, Brigadier Hateall and Hum Humbug, a group of scoundrels oppressing a land she called Servia.

Mercy Warren's interest in political controversy did not end with the American Revolution. She was one of those who, in the winter of 1787-88, opposed ratification of the Constitution because it had no bill of rights. She also wrote a defense of the French Revolution which was unpopular with the Federalists. Her major work was a three-volume history of the American Revolution which she began while the Revolution was still in progress and

published in 1805. The work is noted for its lively portraits of political leaders with whom Mercy Warren was personally acquainted, and for her outspoken Jeffersonian Republican views. Her Federalist friend John Adams was so angered by her account of him as one who had "forgotten the principles of the American Revolution" that their friendship was shaken, and he complained that "History is not the Province of Ladies."[5]

WOMEN IN THE WAR EFFORT

When the fighting broke out patriot women stepped up the activities in which they were already engaged--making cloth, boycotting English goods, writing poems and propaganda--and added new ones. Phillis Wheatley, the black poet, who had been born a slave, wrote a poem in honor of George Washington which was published in 1776. The Baltimore printer Mary Katherine Goddard was commissioned by the Continental Congress to print the first edition of the Declaration of Independence. Women gunsmiths and blacksmiths made weapons, tanners prepared goatskins for drumheads and flag makers sewed regimental banners.

It is a flag maker, curiously enough, that is probably the best known woman of the Revolutionary period--Betsy Ross, commonly credited with being the maker of the first Stars and Stripes. As legend has it, Betsy Ross (1752-1836) was secretly visited in her Philadelphia upholstery shop by a committee which included Washington and other members of the Continental Congress, and commissioned to make the first flag. However, there seems to be very little historical evidence to support this story, which was first circulated publicly by Betsy Ross's grandson in the 1870's. It is known that Betsy Ross had the misfortune to have two husbands die in the Revolution and that she did make flags for Pennsylvania regiments.

During the Revolutionary War, as in all future wars in which Americans engaged, women formed organizations to aid the war effort. They organized the production of stockings and cloth for uniforms, collected scrap metal to be melted down into shot, and helped to manufacture gunpowder and cartridges. The largest organization of women was a relief organization usually called "the Association," founded in 1780 by Esther De Berdt Reed, the wife of the governor of Pennsylvania. The immediate purpose of the Association was to raise money to give as a gift to Washington's soldiers in the hope of improving army morale. The remarkable sum of $7500 in gold raised by the women was, at Washington's request, used to buy linen which the women made into over 2000 shirts for the bedraggled soldiers. When Esther Reed died in September 1780, after attempting to organize relief committees in other cities, Sarah Franklin Bache, the daughter of Benjamin Franklin, headed the Association.

Women also participated collectively in episodes of mob violence that were a common feature of life before and during the Revolution. Women took part in the tar-and-feathering of known loyalists and on several occasions mobs of women forced open the warehouses of merchants known to be hoarding such staples as sugar and coffee. In a letter to John Adams dated July 31, 1777, Abigail Adams describes one such episode:

which the British occupied throughout the war and where more young men signed up with the British than with the Continental army. Although there was not much organization among Loyalist women, certain individual women aided the British cause as spies and couriers. Margaret Shipen Arnold, the wife of Benedict Arnold, was said to have influenced him to betray the patriot cause. In many families, husbands and wives were divided in their loyalties.

Thousands of women accompanied the armies of both sides as camp followers, many of them the wives of soldiers. Most of them performed "housekeeping" services for the troops--repairing clothing, laundering, nursing, cooking--for which they received a small stipend. Two such women who distinguished themselves in battle were Mary Hays McCauley and Margaret Corbin, both of whom have been celebrated in legend as "Captain Molly" or "Molly Pitcher." Mary Hays was at her husband's side during the Battle of Monmouth in 1778. She carried water to the thirsty troops, and when her husband fell, she loaded his cannon, keeping it in action until the Continental troops were victorious. In a similar action, Margaret Corbin, accompanying her husband at the Battle of Fort Washington, took up his battle station when he fell, mortally wounded, and was badly wounded herself. Her heroism was recognized and she eventually received a meager government pension for her army services.

Though most camp followers were poor women who attached themselves to the army for economic reasons, there were also numerous examples of officers' wives staying with their husbands in camp and performing such chores as mending uniforms, collecting food and medicine for the sick and helping with clerical work. They also enabled their husbands to maintain a civilized style of living which included social gatherings and dances. The most eminent of officers' wives was, of course, Martha Washington, who frequently joined her husband at his various headquarters and was said to have had a cheering effect on her husband and his men.

Irregular military action, what we now might call guerrilla warfare, was very important during the Revolutionary War, and contributed to the demoralization of the British army. British regulars faced not only American regulars, but also militia units and individual men and women defending their homes. Catherine Schuyler, the wife of General Philip Schuyler, set fire to the wheat fields of her estate near Saratoga, New York, so that the advancing British army under Burgoyne could not harvest them. Women on the frontier, skilled in handling weapons, defended their homes against Loyalist militia, Indians and small numbers of British soldiers. On occasion women's militia units dressed in men's clothes drove off British troops.

Most of the Indians actively involved in the fighting of the Revolutionary War were on the side of the British. Two Indian women became known for their actions on opposing sides of the conflict. Nancy Ward (c.1738-1822) was a full-blooded Cherokee, who had distinguished herself as an Indian warrior during a battle between the Cherokees and the Creeks in 1775. When her husband was killed in battle, she took his place, helping the Cherokees to a decisive victory. For this action she was named "Beloved Woman" of the tribe, in which office she was head of the Woman's Council and a member of the Council of Chiefs.

Possibly because of a brief marriage to white trader Bryant Ward, she was friendly with the white settlers along the river valleys of Tennessee. Several times during the War Ward reportedly warned the settlers of pro-British Cherokee raids. When counterattacks against the Cherokees were being planned by colonial troops, she succeeded in getting the troops to spare her native village. She spoke for the defeated Cherokees during peace negotiations with the settlers, and tried to promote friendship between the two peoples. After the war she tried to strengthen her people by introducing dairying and cattle raising, and repeatedly warned them not to give up their land. But Nancy Ward's efforts could not stem the tide of white settlers. She died away from her native village, and thirteen years after her death, the Indian Removal Act forced the Cherokees to leave their southern homeland for good.

On the loyalist side was Mary (or Molly) Brant (c.1736-1796), a Mohawk, whose brother Joseph Brant was the most well known Indian warrior during the American Revolution. During the war brother and sister worked actively to keep the Iroquois on the British side. Of her great influence over the Iroquois one British Indian agent reportedly said: "One word from her goes farther with them than a thousand from any white man without exception."[7] After peace came in 1783, Molly Brant, like other Loyalists, and like other Iroquois, went to Canada where she was given land. The Indians were the ultimate losers in the American war for independence.

Owing to the irregular character of the Revolutionary War, the fact that there was often no clear division between the battle zone and the home front, women participated more fully in the military side of the war than they were to do in any subsequent wars.

NOTES

1. Linda Grant de Pauw, *Founding Mothers: Women in America in the Revolutionary Era* (Boston, 1975) pp. 151-152.

2. Ibid., p. 159.

3. De Pauw and Hunt, "*Remember the Ladies*," p. 91 (reproduction of cartoon of "Edenton Tea Party").

4. Ibid., p. 83.

5. James and James, eds., *Notable American Women*, vol. III, p. 546.

6. Butterfield, Friedlaender and Kline, eds., *The Book of Abigail and John*, pp. 184-185.

7. De Pauw, *Founding Mothers*, p. 123.

Questions for Inquiry and Discussion

1. Below are the names of women who played a part in the American Revolution. Match the name of the person with the event or action for which she is known.

1. Mercy Warren	a. She performed a dramatic midnight ride to rouse the militia to save Danbury from an attack by the British
2. Lydia Darragh	b. She fought in the Continental Army disguised as a man
3. Mary Hays McCauley	c. She set fire to her wheat fields to prevent the British from harvesting them
4. Esther De Berdt Reed	d. She wrote political plays attacking the royal governor and the Tories
5. Sybil Ludington	e. She spied on the British in her own house and warned the Continental forces of a sneak attack
6. Catherine Schuyler	f. She organized the "Association," a relief organization to raise money for a gift of shirts to the Continental soldiers
7. Deborah Sampson	g. She was a camp follower who took her fallen husband's place in battle

2. Describe the roles of the Indian women Molly Brant and Nancy Ward in the revolutionary conflict.

3. Is it possible that an ideal of proper feminine behavior has prevented historians from giving credit to the achievements of women who played an active part in the war for independence? Why is it that Betsy Ross, who, contrary to legend, probably never made the first American flag, is better remembered than Deborah Sampson or Sybil Ludington?

Optional Activity

For a class or committee project, read eyewitness accounts, such as letters and diaries, of women who lived through the American Revolution, and select passages to present to the class. Try to present a cross section of colonial women: rich and poor, urban and rural, patriot and loyalist. See the Bibliography for useful sources.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN

WOMEN, THE RIGHTS OF MAN AND THE COMMON LAW

Did the Declaration of Independence, the American Revolution and finally the federal Constitution bring the blessings of freedom and equality to everyone in the former British colonies? By no means. In theory, the principles of the Declaration and the Constitution applied to all, but in practice, large segments of the population were excluded from the political process at the very beginning of the American republic: nontaxpayers, those who had lived in the country less than two years, those under twenty-one, blacks and all women. However, liberty, equality and the natural rights of persons are contagious ideas. It was inevitable that women, especially those caught up in the revolutionary struggle, would begin to question their subordinate status in society.

That Abigail Adams was one such woman is evident in her letter of March 31, 1776, to John Adams while he was attending the Continental Congress:

> ...and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If perticular care and attention is not paid to the Laidies we are determined to foment a Rebelion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice or Representation.[1]

As much as John Adams valued his wife's judgment in most matters, he was clearly amused by her request to "remember the ladies":

> ...As to your extraordinary Code of Laws, I cannot but laugh. We have been told that our Struggle has loosened the bands of Government every where. That children and Apprentices were disobedient--that schools and Colledges were grown turbulent--that Indians slighted their Guardians and Negroes grew insolent to their Masters. But your letter was the first Intimation that another Tribe more numerous and powerful than all the rest were grown discontented...[2]

To her friend and sister patriot, Mercy Warren, Abigail then complained:

> ...He is very sausy to me in return for a List of Female Grievances which I transmitted to him. I think I will get you to join me in a petition to Congress. I thought

> it was very probable our wise Statesmen would erect a New Government and form a new code of Laws. I ventured to speak a word in behalf of our Sex, which are rather hardly dealt with by the Laws of England which gives such unlimited power to the Husband to use his Wife Ill.[3]

When Abigail Adams asked her husband to "remember the ladies" in the "new Code of Laws," it is most likely that she had in mind changes in the common law rather than the granting of political rights to women. The right to vote was not an important issue for women during the early years of the republic, a period when many men did not vote because of the property qualifications for suffrage. In colonial days, single women who were taxpayers had been legally entitled to vote, although there were only a few instances of women exercising that right. In New Jersey, under the state constitution of 1776, and a special election law of 1790, unmarried women who paid taxes were entitled to vote. They did so in significant numbers until 1807, when in response to years of corruption at the polls, the state legislature limited suffrage to "free white males."

Women suffered much more from the common law, what Abigail Adams called the "Laws of England," than they did from the lack of voting rights. For the common law, which had taken hold in varying degrees in the English colonies, defined the legal status of a married woman in the following way:

> In this consolidation which we call wedlock is a locking together. It is true, that man and wife are one person, but understand in what manner. When a small brooke or little river incorporates with...the Thames, the poor rivulet loses her name; it is carried and recarried with the new associate; it beareth no sway;...A woman as soon as she is married is called <u>covert</u>; in Latin <u>nupta</u>, that is "veiled"; as it were, clouded and overshadowed; she has lost her scream. I may more truly...say to a married woman, Her new self is her superior; her companion, her master...Eve because she had helped to seduce her husband, had inflicted upon her a special bane. See here the reason...that women have no voice in Parliament. They make no laws, they consent to none, they abrogate none.[4]

According to this view, a married woman and her husband were merged into one person and <u>he</u> was the person. A wife had no separate legal identity. She was forbidden to have a voice in the making of laws. A woman could not hold property in her own name and her husband controlled the property she brought to marriage as well as her own earnings. She could not sign contracts or be a witness in court and she could be deprived of her children in case of separation. Her husband had the right to beat her and to hire her out as a servant and collect her wages. Since she as well as the clothes on her back were the property of her husband, if she ran away, she could be charged as a thief for stealing herself and the clothing. The subjection of women, declares the law, was a punishment for the disobedience of the first woman, Eve.

Was the common law as it related to women strictly enforced? It seems that during most of the colonial period the observance of the common law was somewhat relaxed, partly because of the frontier conditions which promoted equality between the sexes, and partly because of a lack of lawyers, courts and law books in the colonies. Women did many things that, strictly speaking, they weren't allowed to do under the law. This state of affairs changed when Blackstone's Commentaries, an English work summarizing the common law, was published between 1765 and 1769. Colonial lawyers hungry for law books snapped up Blackstone's work as a standard textbook and tended to consult it on all legal questions. And, according to Blackstone, a married woman was not even a separate person in law. Thus, ironically, at the very time that the founders of the American republic were embracing a more democratic form of government, laws which gave husbands absolute power over wives were beginning to be strictly enforced. And despite the protests of Abigail Adams and others, the legal subordination of women prevailed well into the nineteenth century.

Those who were unhappy about women's status tended to focus their discontent on female education. They argued that women were born with an intellectual capacity equal to that of men, but that the inferior education available to women prevented them from developing their minds in the same way. An important influence on early American "feminist" thinkers was Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), an Englishwoman who was associated with radical thinkers in England and in France. The book that brought her fame was A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792), a lengthy argument for the emancipation of women and an attack on the social and economic system that kept women down. Mary Wollstonecraft despised the type of education for women that stressed manners, dress and emotion and that encouraged women to be passive, helpless and ornamental.

During the 1790's, Wollstonecraft's ideas found an echo in the writings of Judith Sargent Murray (1751-1820) of Gloucester, Massachusetts, who had published a series of essays on the education of girls. Writing under the pen name "Constantia," she proclaimed the equality of the sexes and noted the great differences between the education of boys and girls:

> ...from what source doth this superiority, in this determining faculty of the soul (the judgment) proceed? May we not trace its source in the difference of education and continued advantages? Will it be said that the judgment of a male two years old, is more sage than that of a female's of the same age? I believe the reverse is generally observed to be true. But from that period what partiality? How is the one exalted and the other depressed, by the contrary modes of education that are adopted! The one is taught to aspire, the other is early confined and limited. As their years increase, the sister must be wholly domesticated, while the brother is led by the hand through all the flowery paths of science.[5]

Murry argued that women should be educated to be the "sensible" companions of men, and if necessary, should be able to support themselves.

An American book that surpassed even Murray's essays as a sustained argument for women's rights was Alcuin: A Fierce and Elegant Plea for the Rights of Woman, which was written by a man. It was the first book by Charles Brockden Brown, considered to be the first professional writer in America. Alcuin (1798 and 1815) is a lively dialogue between Alcuin, an open-minded schoolmaster, and Mrs. Carter, a proper middle-class widow of surprisingly outspoken views. In the course of their conversation, Mrs. Carter argues, like Judith Murray and Mary Wollstonecraft, that if women have not become scientists and philosophers like Newton and Socrates, it is because their education has not encouraged them to do so:

> ...To settle a bill of fare, to lard a pig, to compose a pudding, to carve a goose, are tasks that do not...tend to instil the love, or facilitate the acquisition of literature and science...Women are generally superficial and ignorant because they are generally cooks and seamstresses.[6]

In addition to criticizing the defective education of women, the author, using Mrs. Carter as a mouthpiece, moves beyond the issue of education to attack the unfavorable legal status of women, and finally, their exclusion from the nation's political life. When Alcuin casually asks Mrs. Carter if she is a Federalist, the lady responds bitterly:

> What have I, as a woman, to do with politics? Even the government of our country, which is said to be the freest in the world, passes over women as if they were not. We are excluded from all political rights without the least ceremony. Lawmakers thought as little of comprehending us in their code of liberty, as if we were pigs, or sheep...While I am conscious of being an intelligent and moral being.[7]

BLACK WOMEN EMERGE

The revolutionary war era was one in which black Americans began emerging for the first time as individuals on the stage of history. This was the time of men like Benjamin Banneker, scientist, and Paul Cuffee, sea captain and fighter for a better life for his people. Outstanding black women also played their part in this development. In Massachusetts in 1781 a slave woman, Elizabeth Freeman, also known as Mumbet, whose husband had been killed fighting in the Continental army, successfully sued for her freedom on the grounds that the Massachusetts Constitution declared that all people were born free and equal. Shortly thereafter, Massachusetts abolished slavery altogether.

One of the very few black women to achieve fame in the period of the Revolution was Phillis Wheatley (c.1753-1784). Probably born in Africa, Wheatley was bought in 1761 directly from a slave ship by a wealthy Boston

merchant, John Wheatley. Perhaps because of her unusual intelligence and gentle manners, she was brought up as a pampered child of the family rather than as a slave, and was educated by the older children of the family. By the time she was in her teens, Phillis Wheatley was learning Latin, reading English literature and beginning to write poetry. She became something of a curiosity among influential friends of the Wheatley family. Although her poetry was not outstanding, it was considered to be an amazing accomplishment at a time when few black people had any opportunities for education and when most were regarded as inferior to whites in mental ability. The first black poet in America was Lucy Terry, a slave in Deerfield, Massachusetts, who in 1746 composed a lively poem describing a bloody Indian raid on that town.

In 1773 Phillis Wheatley went to England where she was a great success with the nobility and where a book of her verse was published entitled Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral. Her rather sheltered life changed after she returned to America, with the breakup of the Wheatley family circle and the coming of the Revolution. The public had lost interest in her, though there was a brief flurry of interest when her patriotic poem "His excellency General Washington" was published in April 1776, and she visited the General at his headquarters in Cambridge. She had her freedom, but she couldn't earn her living writing poetry.

She married a free black man named John Peters, who, though he seemed to have been a person of some education, failed to support her and the three children she bore him. Her fragile health broke under the strain of poverty and the deaths of two of her children. She was finally reduced to working as a domestic in a boarding house to support herself and her remaining child. They both died on the same day in December 1784. Most of Phillis Wheatley's poems were written for special occasions and are filled with the classical references then considered appropriate in formal verse. Occasionally she reminds the reader of the tragedy of slavery, and voices her love of freedom:

> I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate
> Was snatch'd from Afric's fancy'd happy seat:
> What pangs excruciating must molest,
> What sorrows labour in my parent's breast!
> Steel'd was the soul and by no misery mov'd
> That from a father seiz'd his babe belov'd.
> Such, such my case. And can I then but pray
> Others may never feel tyrannic sway?[8]

Surely her words express the hopes that the American Revolution brought to black men and women.

LADIES, FEMALE ACADEMIES AND LADIES' BOOKS

The years after the Revolution saw the growth of a great number of schools for girls. In 1798, Judith Sargent Murray wrote with satisfaction that "female academies are everywhere establishing" and that she expected

to see the "young women forming a new era in female history." One of those responsible for proposing a serious course of study for young women was Dr. Benjamin Rush, a Philadelphia doctor and noted reformer, one of the earliest advocates for mass education as training for good citizenship in the new republic. Dr. Rush believed that women should be educated to instruct "their sons in the principles of liberty and government" and to exert a civilizing influence on society. He outlined a substantial curriculum for women, consisting of English (grammar, spelling and penmanship), history, biography, geography, bookkeeping, poetry, dancing, music and religious instruction.

Unfortunately, the pattern of female education put forth by Dr. Rush and others was not followed by most of the "female academies" springing up in the young republic. These tended to be finishing schools for fashionable ladies rather than centers of serious learning. By the early years of the republic, a new ideal of womanhood--the fashionable lady--had been formed, which would move women away from the practical economic roles they had played during the colonial and revolutionary periods. As wealth developed in the colonies and later in the new republic, the differences between social classes became more pronounced. In the seaport towns of New England and the Middle States, as well as in the large plantation states, there developed a wealthy class who tried to imitate the fashions and manners of the English aristocracy. The ladies of this class wore costly dresses worn over tightly laced corsets which accentuated the feminine figure. For a brief period fashion also dictated ridiculously high hairdos and wigs. When not supervising their servants and slaves, such ladies might spend their time visiting, playing cards, reading novels or doing fancy needlework.

For instruction in the proper feminine behavior, aspiring ladies were likely to consult a variety of "ladies' books," which spelled out in detail the duties of women and their special virtues, and gave advice on the proper behavior of women toward men. Almost all the ladies' books came from England and were written by men. The underlying assumption of these books was that there was a strong distinction between the virtues and the duties of men and women. According to most of the ladies' books, a woman's primary duty was obedience, to parents and husband, and the most appropriate feminine virtues were modesty, meekness, piety and delicacy. Two of the most popular ladies' books warned women against displaying any mental or physical traits that might appear to be masculine:

> Be even careful in displaying your <u>good sense</u>. It will be thought you assume a superiority over the rest of the company. But if you happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret, especially from the men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts and a cultivated understanding.[9]

Women were likewise warned to conceal good health and a hearty appetite lest such bodily strength disgust men.

The ladies' books were part of the course of study at the "female academies" of the day, along with harpischord playing and singing, dancing, fancy

needlework, drawing and French--in short, all the "accomplishments" thought necessary for a fashionable young woman in order to attract a wealthy mate. It was unlikely that such a course of study would produce "learned ladies" on the order of Mercy Warren or Judith Sargent Murray, or others who had flourished in the revolutionary era.

The equality of the sexes in fact, if not in law, that American women had enjoyed in colonial and revolutionary times was fast disappearing by the early years of the nineteenth century. The ideal of the passive, ornamental lady set forth in the ladies' books and female academies was on its way to becoming the dominant ideal of feminity, not for just a wealthy few, but for most white middle-class women. Meanwhile, the strength, courage and independence of the women of colonial and revolutionary times were no longer valued qualities. Abigail Adams' grandson, Charles Francis Adams, commented in 1840 on the lost ideal of womanhood:

> The heroism of the females of the Revolution has gone from memory with the generation that witnessed it, and nothing, absolutly nothing remains upon the ear of the young of the present day.[10]

NOTES

1. Butterfield, Friedlander and Kline, eds. *The Book of Abigail and John,* p. 121.

2. Ibid., p. 123.

3. L.H. Butterfield, ed., *Adams Family Correspondence* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963) vol. I., pp. 396-398.

4. Spruill, *Women's Life and Work,* p. 340.

5. Flexner, *Century of Struggle,* p. 16. Quotation is from *Massachusetts Magazine,* March-April 1790, pp. 132-133.

6. Charles Brockden Brown, *Alcuin: A Fierce and Elegant Plea for the Rights of Woman* (1798 and 1815; paperback reprint, New York, 1970) pp. 13-14.

7. Ibid., p. 29.

8. G. Herbert Renfro, *Life and Works of Phillis Wheatley,* ed., Leila Amos Pendleton (1916; paperback reprint, Miami, Florida, 1969) p. 80.

9. Spruill, *Women's Life and Work,* p. 220.

10. De Pauw and Hunt, *"Remember the Ladies,"* p. 9.

Questions for Inquiry and Discussion

1. Reread the "Remember the Ladies" passage from Abigail Adams' letter to her husband, p. 00, and his reply, pp. 43-44. What was she asking for? Put her request into your own words. What was she referring to when she cautioned her husband and his fellow lawmakers not to "put such unlimited power into the hands of husbands"?

2. Carefully read the passage defining the legal status of a married woman under the common law, pp. 44-45. Interpret. What were the unfavorable aspects of a married woman's status? What was the religious justification for this status? Why was women's legal status especially unfavorable after 1765?

3. Why did the English feminist Mary Wollstonecraft and the American feminist Judith Sargent Murray both object to the way in which women were educated? Reread the passage on p. 45. Why, according to Murray, do males generally have judgment superior to females?

4. Describe the typical education of a well-to-do young woman in the years after the American Revolution. Why were subjects like French, dancing and needlework considered important for a woman to know?

5. Why did the ideal of the "fashionable lady," as promoted by the female academies and the "ladies' books," undermine the values of strength, independence and courage that had been prized in the home of colonial and revolutionary times? What were some of the reasons behind the changing ideal of womanhood?

Optional Activity

Read a number of the poems by Phillis Wheatley and choose a few that you like in particular. Prepare a biographical essay on her life. Combine the poems and biography into a presentation on this famous woman. The presentation can take any format you wish--bulletin board, booklet, poster, etc. (See Bibliography for sources.)

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